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INTERVIEW WITH A MEMBER OF THE TIMORESE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN DILI

Confidential

This fall Antonio Anacelto Serra, aged 23, visited Canada on Canada World Youth program from September to December,1990. I was able to visit him in Campbell River and he was able to visit me in Ladysmith.

Antonio is paired with a Canadian youth, Ethan Friendly, from Toronto. They have been together in Canada for four months. They will go to Indonesian on December 15 and spend three months in Lombok. When Antonio arrives in Indonesian he will no doubt be questioned as to whether he spoke to anyone about the human rights situation in East Timor.

Before being allowed to leave East Timor he was interrogated by Koopskam (army), the police, and the Social and Political office. He was told not to say anything about human rights in East Timor or independence for East Timor. Just to forget about it. And if he was asked about demonstrations in Dili he should say he doesn't know anything about it.

Antonio, though involved in the student resistance since 1985 has managed to avoid detection and arrest. Several months ago he was told to report to Koopskam and issued an Intelligence card. He was told to infiltrate and report any information about the student movement. He could not refuse in order to protect his life, but when he is called in he tells the Indonesians he has nothing to tell them. Antonio said that many Timorese youth are required to do this usually for a nine month period.

Antonio will have three months left to serve when he gets back to Dili. He hopes that he will be released by Koopskam after this. He is worried for his safety and hopes that by making contacts in Canada we can speak out if he is arrested.

"Many persons are disappeared in Dili now," says Antonio, "or killed in 'accidents', there are many 'accidents' from the Indonesians in our country ." [In September a new death squad, called the Ninja was formed to combatt student unrest. They dress in black and cover their heads with black hoods. They come at night and the person(s) taken are never seen again.]

When Antonio left East Timor all his money was taken from him by Indonesian customs.. He arrived in Canada without a cent. Though he has written to his parents a number of times since being in Canada but has recieved no replies. The Indonesian students in the program have all recieved mail from their parents.

Antonio is from the village of Wai-Lili near Baucau, the second largest town in East Timor. He speaks three indigenous languages, Makassae (his ethnic group), Tetum, Medici, and also

Indonesian, Portugese and English.

Since 1975 Baucau has become a sizeable military base for Indonesian military operations against Timorese resistance forces operating in the Eastern part of the island . Baucau was invaded by a large force of Indonesian soldiers shortly after the taking of Dili.

Antonio says " that when the Indonesians entered my village 1975 they killed many persons. They killed my uncle because he had a Fretilin flag. They dumped the bodies in the river and when the people went to get water they could not drink it because it had blood in it from all the dead persons. Then the Indonesians took the remainder of the village population to Baucau and told them to come back once a week for rations." Antonio was eight years old at the time.

"Supervision in the village is done by six Javanese persons and their families. No visiting is allowed at night and the people must ask for everything. There is no freedom. In 1987-88 foodgathering in the forest was not permitted in the sub-district of Vinilalai and Baucau because of Indonesian military operations in the area. Even today there is much hunger in my village . My father, a carpenter and a farmer, was just released from jail in Baucau before I left. He was accused of trying to contact Fretilin when he went outside of the prescribed zone to look for food for the people and the animals, grass, cocoanut, breadfruit etc."

" Before," Antonio says, "our village was very prosperous, one family (clan) could own hundreds of buffalo and many horses. Now we have few buffalo, only 5 or 10 and must sometimes use the horses to make the fields ready for planting. Many persons are sick and the Indonesians force birth control on the Timorese women even though they don't want it.

"It is very difficult for us to practice our traditions and to hold proper weddings and funerals." says Antonio.. Corameton, (large gathering where much food and wealth was exchanged similar to the West Coast Indian Potlach) is now forbidden. The Indonesians say we are too wasteful, that we kill too many animals, that there is too much feasting , too much dancing and singing and wasting our time. Now we must accept to be Catholic or one other religion that the Indonesians allow. We prefer to be Catholic but we don't forget our traditions and keep these things secret from the Indonesians and the Indonesian priests."

" When new buildings are made in Baucau they are never for the population but for the Indonesians. New settlers are brought in every week from Java, Bali, Sulawesi and other places. There is no freedom of speech, the education the Indonesians give us is bad. About 75% of the students at the University are Indonesian. They threaten to close the University if we Timorese students

continue to demonstate for our rights. "

" The Indonesians say they own everything in East Timor now, the land, the forest, the fish, the animals and that the Timorse own nothing. The Timorese don't accept this and are very angry with the Indonesians over many things. We want them to go out of East Timor and to stop everything bad that they do in East Timor. They never do what we like but have many repressions against us and lie to the outside world about conditions in East Timor. We are suffering many things.....murders and tortures and rapes. We cannot even send a letter out of East Timor to outside world. This is why I must come to Canada to send letters to the Pope, Peres de Cuellar, and Joe Clark."

"In the east away from Baucau towards Los Pallos and Viqueque the Timorese traditional (self-sufficient) economy still exists but under very difficult conditions. The village markets have been destroyed by the Indonesians and we cannot move freely to sell and exchange our goods. And it is also difficult for the farmers to tend their crops on the poor land the Indonesians are giving us. Many Timorese are homesick for the lands of their ancestors but if they try to go back to their homelands the Indonesians will kill them."

"In the west towards Maliana the Indonesians have very much replaced the Timorese economy with cash crops grown for their own benefit.....coffee, rice, cardamon, sugar and rice. They say they (the generals) are developing East Timor but it is only they who are getting rich from the lands of the Timorese people."

"The traditional Timorese weavings are still done in places like Mabisse but it is organized by the Indonesians and the profits are taken by the Indonesians. A company directly from Suharto called Batara Indra Company collects what the Timorese have done and sells them in Bali and other places. It is illegal to weave and sell on ones own but people still do it."

" There is no freedom in East Timor. No freedom of speech, life or anything. Our palm and cocoanut leaf houses are easily attacked by the Indonesians. We are not even free to visit in our own villages at night. Before we were always healthy, and had little sickness. Now we are often sick and dying from lack of food and the repressions that the Indonesians make against us. We cannot get the medecines we need because the Indonesians keep these for themselves. And we cannot go to the forest to look for traditional medicines because the Indonesians will say we are going to give food and help to the resistance and will kill us."

"Many persons never come back when the Indonesians take them. Last year Raimon Marques, a neighbour, was taken and we never saw him again. First he hid for 2 weeks because he was afraid of the Indonesian soldiers. Then he got in a fight with the soldiers and they sedated him but he ran away from them later. They they took him and tortured him, immersed his head in

water and beat him cruely.. And the soldiers used him to work for them. But after we never saw him again."

" In 1986 my youngest father [uncle] Filomeno Martins Belo was taken. He was given electric shock and many beatings. He was two weeks in Samalari and then to Baucau and then to Quelicai where they killed him. They accused him of contacting Fretilin. Many persons have been killed in Quelicai."

" There were also executions in Comoro by Koopskam in 1987 and 1988 of men from Samalari and Wai-lili."

" In 1983 about 20 persons from my village joined Fretilin. Adolpho Gusmao was disappeared from our village by Indonesian soldiers when the big repression started after the cease-fire."

" Before the Pope's visit 4 youths were killed in the Hotel Tourismo in Dili by the police and Koopskam. I don't know their names. There is much repression against the youth in East Timor now.....the police, the army, the Red Berets, the death squads. Indonesian intelligence is everywhere, they wear ordinary clothes and the interview us very friendly but we generally know them by their actions. They don't understand Tetum or other Timorese languages but we know everything that they say."

I showed Antonio a recent Amnesty International Urgent Action outlining the cases of five Timorese youth who had been arrested in September of this year after a pro-independence demonstration in Dili. He knew four of them, Aleixo Laga, Vicente Amaral Moniz , Estubio and Agostinho Pereira. He said that " though the Indonesians kill them and torture them, (the youth) they will continue their struggle till Indonesia leaves East Timor."

At this point I asked Antonio what he would like us in the international network to do to help East Timor?

He said "first he would say many thanks for all the peoples of the world and Canada for helping East Timor. The Timorese people need you to continue and press to speak out against human rights violations in East Timor. Students and journalists and members of parliament especially. We need your help for Indonesia to leave East Timor. Canada is a big friend to Indonesia and can help us very much. We would like our own country. Our own country in peace. You don't have war in Canada and it is hard for many persons to understand our life in East Timor but we ask you to speak to Indonesia about human rights violations and when are the United Nations making a referendum in East Timor? We are waiting for many years for having our own country."

" Any ideas to support us are welcome. Our biggest wish is to have an office in Dili for human rights and for the youth of Dili because we are having no place to go in our own town. Now the Indonesians say East Timor is open and free and there are no human rights violations but this is not true. So we are saying

we want to have a office for the youth in Dili to communicate with the outside world and to have our safety . We ask to be able to send letters out and recieve letters in . To recieve visitors and to speak openly with them about the true situation in East Timor. We need the solidarity of the international peoples for this project. We would like to cooperate with journalists and human rights groups. We thank you and hope for your happy life and good health."

Before parting Antonio gave me a sheaf of letters to send to the Pope, President Mario Soares of Portugal, the General Secretary of the United Nations, Peres de Cuellar, human rights groups and Joe Clark.

When I expressed concern over his signature on the letter to Joe Clark and the fact that External Affairs may give it to the Indonesians he said that " in East Timor many persons die every day of starvation, killings by Indonesian soldiers in the bush and "accidents" by the Indonesians and that he was born from the soil of East Timor and that he would rather be killed for doing something to help his country and he was not afraid of the Indonesians because they could kill him anytime but they will never stop the people of East Timor to resist in every way for their freedom and peace in their land once more."

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Antonio Acacelto Serra, Timorese Youth Leader in Dili.
and
Elaine Briere, coordinator, East Timor Alert Network, Canada.